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## THE AMERICAN ACTA SANCTORUM<sup>1</sup>

IT was natural, and almost inevitable, that a large part of the literature of the Middle Ages should consist of the lives of the saints. The world was a Christian world. In nearly all countries, most writers were ecclesiastics. In a society unreservedly Christian in theory, the main endeavor of clerical writing would surely be to persuade rough men so to live that at the end they might be added to the joyful company of the elect. The saints were those ascertained by universal judgment or papal declaration to inhabit already the mansions of felicity, where evermore they interceded for the members of the church militant. What more natural than that, for the edification of the latter, clerical authors should recount in detail the lives of those who had fought the good fight, had struggled with success up the thorny pathway, had proved that the sanctified life was not impossible to flesh and blood, even to the ardent flesh and insurgent blood of the Middle Ages? Accordingly we have multitudes of such biographies, whose popularity is attested by the great number of manuscript copies in which some of them have survived even to our own time.

It is well known that, in the relative paucity of materials for many portions of medieval history, these pious narratives have been put to frequent and effective use by historians. Sometimes, since

Even in a palace life may be led well,

the saint whose life the historian finds among his materials was himself a man of high position, whose life is an important part of the political history of his country. Such was St. Louis, whose life by the Sire de Joinville is a classical and indispensable part of the record of French national development. Such in a less degree but in a darker country was St. Margaret of Scotland, whose life by Abbot Turgot tells us more of the reign of her husband King Malcolm and of the life of the Scottish nobility and court than we can learn for other parts of that dim century from all other sources put together. That the biographies of statesmen like St. Dunstan

<sup>1</sup> Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Madison, December 27, 1907.

and St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Bernard and St. Eligius, furnish invaluable materials to the historian, requires no demonstration. Other saints, though usually not thus immersed in secular affairs, have nevertheless become so involved in particular episodes that their memoirs become, for the moment, sources of prime importance. We should not willingly part with what we know of the ending of the Babylonish Captivity through the activities of St. Catherine of Siena; in the acts of Saint Demetrius the siege of Thessalonica by the Avars in 597 is so fully recounted as to give us our best details as to the military methods then employed in the siege and defence of fortified places.

Still more obvious and direct is the light which the hagiographers cast on European history when their subjects have borne a leading part in clerical or Christian movements. Biographies like those of St. Cyril and St. Martin, St. Patrick and St. Boniface, are often our chief materials for understanding the conversion of northern and western Europe to Christianity, surely one of the most memorable movements in human history. In the later ages, it is in the lives of St. Francis and St. Dominic and St. Ignatius that we may best study, in their early development, those three organizations which have proved the most potent agencies for maintaining vital Christianity in a world already nominally Christian. Of another variety are the lives or narratives of travelling saints, whose observations are among the chief materials for our knowledge of medieval geography.

Less obvious, but hardly less interesting, is the contribution which the lives of the medieval saints make, indirectly and without intention, to our knowledge of social history. Their authors wrote for purposes of edification and devotion. Often they gave little heed to accuracy of statement; often their clerical prepossessions so beclouded their minds that we cannot trust their testimony in the very matters about which they are most concerned to persuade us. Often, on the other hand, they furnish invaluable testimony about matters respecting which they had no thought of conveying information to any reader. They may falsify the portraits which occupy the foregrounds of their pictures, distort and make unreal the attitudes and actions which their minds are set on delineating; but the background is rendered with photographic fidelity, because depicted automatically and unconsciously. It is as certain that the biographer of St. Gervinus or St. Gingulphus will give us trustworthy data of the manners and customs of his time, as that the great Florentine artists will in the backgrounds of their Biblical

pictures afford us veracious glimpses of the Tuscan landscape of the sixteenth century. They could not do otherwise. Thus from the hagiographers we often derive fragments of evidence in social history which we should seek in vain in the professed chronicles.

The pious biographer of the Christian missionary little knew that we should value his incidental touches respecting the heathen quite as much as his labored tribute to his hero, should eagerly take our first glimpses of pagan Sweden through the eyes of St. Ansgar, and treasure what little we can learn of conditions in heathen Germany, beyond the borders of civilization, from the life of St. Boniface written by a simple-minded companion. Nowhere does the student of folklore find fuller data as to pagan superstitions and practices in seventh-century Gaul than in the life of St. Eligius. As of the heathen, so also of those humble and inarticulate classes concerning whose life the chroniclers of the Middle Ages tell us so little. Froissart might think of none but lords and ladies; kings and barons, bishops and abbots, might fill the canvas of Matthew Paris. But the Kingdom of Heaven was a Christian democracy. The Northumbrian peasant, the merchant's son of Assisi, the shepherd girl of Lorraine, might become saints, and their biographies, especially the stories of their childhood and youth, will be sure to convey some precious indications as to the everyday life of the classes from which they sprang. Much of our best knowledge of the situation of the medieval Jews comes from the lives of those sainted children whose blood they were fabled to have shed as a means of keeping their unholy passover—St. William of Norwich or St. Simon of Trent or the holy child of La Guardia.

Since it was ordinarily requisite that sanctity should be attested by miracles, narratives of miracles play a large part in the lives of medieval saints. In these we find many of our best illustrations of medieval conditions and manners, and especially in the stories of miracles of healing. Such stories are full of instruction respecting medieval diseases and medicine, pestilence, manias and hygiene. How, for instance, should we know anything of the use of anaesthetics in the Middle Ages, if it were not recorded for us in the life of one of the saints that "many persons fall asleep after taking a draught of oblivion, which physicians call *letargion*, and are not sensible of incisions in their limbs, or sometimes of burning and cutting in the vital parts, inflicted on them in this state, and on waking from sleep are not aware of what has been done to them"?

Or again, to take the one point of the language used by educated people in England under the first Plantagenets, a question

respecting which chroniclers are silent; we have our best indications in the hagiographers. William of Canterbury, in his life of St. Thomas Becket, gives a story concerning Helewisia de Morville, wife of one of St. Thomas's murderers, which represents her, a woman of Norman descent, one hundred years after the Conquest, as using English when calling for her husband's aid to punish a refractory Englishman. "Huwe of Morvill, war, war, Liulf haveth his sword ydrawen", she cries; English was her natural tongue. Again, in Reginald of Coldingham's life of the contemporary hermit St. Godric, it appears that the monks of Durham, though Latin was their ordinary language, conversed in English with St. Godric, who spoke French only by miracle. The Virgin taught St. Godric an English hymn, and this is written down in English in Reginald's book, which was intended for the reading of Hugh de Puiset, bishop of Durham. From a passage in the life of bishop Hugh of Lincoln by the abbot Adam of Eynsham, it appears that St. Hugh, who was a Burgundian by birth, did not understand the English dialects of Kent and Huntingdonshire, but that he was addressed by the natives as if it were naturally to be expected that he should understand what they said.

It would be easy to multiply illustrations of the varied and curious ways in which the lives of the saints light up for us the daily life of the Middle Ages. We see in the biography of St. Elizabeth of Hungary the domestic details of a Thuringian castle and of the hovels in the villages around it. In the life of St. Thomas Aquinas we see the characteristics of hazing in medieval universities, and later, in that of St. Stanislaus Kostka, we observe how the same practice was conducted in the college of the Jesuits at Vienna. In the life of St. Etheldreda we perceive, not without instruction, that a great abbess of the seventh century allowed herself the luxury of a hot bath only before the great festivals of the Church, and then made it a demonstration of humility, by first bathing her nuns with her own hands. The story of the Campanian farmer complaining to St. Felix of the theft of his oxen, and menacing the saint, if he does not make good the loss caused by his neglect, or, in the life of St. Wulfstan, the story of the man who had killed another and "could not on any terms obtain the friendship, nor by any payment get the pardon," of the man's relatives, that of his ordering a nut-tree which overhung a church to be cut down, and of the patron's resisting because he sometimes feasted or played at dice under its shade, and that of the sacrist who was enjoined to burn a candle before Wulfstan's tomb for a year, and

to repeat fifteen psalms, for having suffered a book which was in his custody to be stolen, the many tales of funerals and of church-building, of almsgiving, of impiety—such stories as these, though individually of little significance, yet when brought together in sufficient quantity may help us to imagine and to reconstruct those vanished states of society which the contemporary chroniclers take for granted.

Not the least interesting result of such study and combining is the light which a nation's saints throw on a nation's character. "We live by admiration." However much a saint might feel himself to be a member and a champion of the universal church, he could not escape being a man of his own country and age; and in the long run those whom time has selected as the chief saints of a nation have come to that position through a congeniality with the nation's traits that has brought them its steady and natural veneration. In St. Louis we see the pattern of French chivalry, fearless and honorable, full of courtesy and generosity. In Joan of Arc, beatified though not canonized, we see typified the high spirit of the French nation, its military instinct, its imaginative heroism, its enthusiasm for ideals, its ardor of self-sacrifice. In St. Elizabeth of Thuringia we see the type of German domestic and practical piety; in St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier the independence, the reticence, and the organizing power of the Basque. St. Francis of Assisi, with his sensitive poetic imagination, fresh, simple and child-like, sympathetic with the poor, joyful in all renunciation, could be no other than the best-beloved saint of the Italians. St. Teresa, ecstatic in her mystical union with God, yet gay and natural and gifted in practical reforms and other dealings with this world, is as distinctly the Spaniard as the impulsive, passionate, warm-hearted Columba is the genuine Irish Celt, while in St. Cuthbert, buoyant, energetic, the strong walker, the lover of the country and of boyish sports, we see the genuine Northumbrian. (Where indeed but in Yorkshire would William Paternoster have been struck dumb as a punishment for walking alone with a little girl and not enjoying athletic sports?)

But enough has been said of the profit which historians have been able to draw from the stories of the European saints. It is time to turn to the specific subject of the present address. It has been entitled "*The American Acta Sanctorum*". Its purpose is to call attention to an analogous body of material which lies at the service of students of American history, and to suggest certain reflections as to its content and use. At first thought, obvious dif-

ferences strike the mind. The lives of the European saints have for the most part been brought together in comprehensive collections, chief among them the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandist fathers, a stately series of nearly seventy folio volumes, in which the original narratives have been treated with all the resources, and are accompanied with all the apparatus, of modern historical scholarship. The American "Acta Sanctorum", on the other hand, appears in the shape of numberless little books, shabby and faded, printed most often on provincial presses and seldom straying far from the place of origin. Each of them contains an artless biography, composed by some pious friend of the deceased clergyman or other saint, in which his spiritual struggles and triumphs, his labors in the vineyard or sufferings under persecution, are recounted for purposes of edification. Sometimes the little book is an autobiography; and there are a few instances of collective biography, like certain portions of Mather's *Magnalia*. But in general we have only the shabby little provincial books, first and only editions, raw materials of an "Acta Sanctorum", not to be brought together without some difficulty, and nowise provided with a Bollandist apparatus of critical or historical comment. Aside from such differences of form, it must be admitted, as a matter of course, that there are differences of character between the mass of medieval literature we have been considering and any body of Protestant hagiology, mostly lives of married clergymen and laymen living in free modern states; and also that the historian's need of such narratives is less urgent when he is dealing with a period much subsequent to the invention of the printing-press than when he occupies himself with the Dark Ages.

Nevertheless, it may fairly be maintained that the American historical scholar can draw from these ill-printed little memorials of local piety much the same varieties of benefit which his European brother derives from the imposing folios of the *Acta Sanctorum*. In the first place, not a few of our American saints have borne an important part in public affairs. The second book of the *Magnalia*, Turell's life of Benjamin Colman, the memoirs of Presidents Wheelock, Stiles and Dwight, of Manasseh Cutler and Bishop Leonidas Polk, are the lives of persons who exerted great and continuous influence on secular movements in their day and generation. Others impinged upon the circle of political life for lesser periods, or afford us occasional but valued glimpses of its events. The autobiography of Rev. Thomas Shepard casts most precious light upon the early migration to Massachusetts Bay, the life of Rev.

David Caldwell upon the proceedings of the North Carolina convention of 1789, that of President Manning upon the devious course of Rhode Island in the Continental Congress. One of the best accounts of the sea-fight between the frigates *United States* and *Macedonian* is to be found in an autobiographical book by Samuel Leach. Less important, yet of genuine interest, are the curious account which John Churchman, a Quaker preacher, gives of his appearing before the Assembly of Pennsylvania in 1748 to dissuade it from the support of warlike measures; his narrative of the treaty with Teedyuscung and other Indians at Easton in 1757, at which he was present; and the glimpses which saintly John Richardson gives us of Penn and Baltimore and Lady Baltimore in 1702.

As in the parallel case of the European saints, however, we naturally find fuller light upon those transactions which would fall more distinctly within the usual scope of clerical endeavor. The life of John Woolman is surely one of the classics of our colonial literature, marked by all that beauty of spirit and of phrase which elevation, serenity, the habit of meditation, and intimacy with the Bible could so often confer on the writings of the Quakers; but it is also one of the classics of the early anti-slavery movement, and one of the best and best-known examples of the class which we are describing. The life of good Anthony Benezet, the journals of Bishop Coke, are other examples. The anti-slavery movement is illustrated by passages in a host of such biographies; the temperance movement by others. The essential data regarding the formation in 1826 of the Virginia Society for the Promotion of Temperance, of its local auxiliaries, and of the Georgia State Temperance Society some two years later, are best sought in the biography of Elder Abner W. Clopton.

We have also our saintly travellers, whose roamings over our vast continent have enriched the history of American geography with some of its best materials. What William Rubruk and John of Plano Carpini were to medieval geography, that surely were Marquette and Jogues and DeSmet, Father Francisco Garcés and Father Junípero Serra to the exploration of the United States. But upon hagiology of this class it is superfluous to dwell in this city, in which was prepared for publication Dr. Thwaites's splendid series of the *Jesuit Relations*.

But, as in the European case, many of the most interesting and most valuable bits of historical knowledge which we can obtain from our American saints' lives are conveyed to us by the author without his intending to do anything of the sort. Contemporary biog-



rapher or autobiographer, he pictures unconsciously, so far as he pictures it at all, the social *milieu* which he saw before him. His object is to edify, to bring about the conversion of precious souls. If we obtain from his pages anything else than our edification or conversion, it is "*corban*, that is to say a gift"; it has been no part of his purpose to furnish materials for the historian. All the more certain is it that what we thus obtain will be trustworthy evidence, except in so far as some general prepossession of the preacher, for which we can make allowance, shall enter in to darken his picture of the actual unregenerate world.

In one particular our analogy will be found defective. The Protestant world having assumed that since the time of the apostles the mediation of the saints has not had the power of effecting miracles, we shall not find in our American Protestant lives an exact parallel to those miraculous tales which have so large a place in medieval hagiology, and which furnish us so many interesting glimpses into the lives of those mostly humble persons for whose benefit the miracles were wrought. But after all the defect is fairly well supplied. If the Protestant biographer is not disposed to maintain that his hero could work miracles, yet he knows well that God defends his elect, and often interposes through "special providences" to protect clergymen of his favorite denomination. Thus, though miracles performed at the saint's tomb or by his relics are absent, the pages of American hagiology bristle with special providences, by means of which we often penetrate into the obscurity of colonial or frontier life.

As the saints of old, and their biographers, lead us within sight of the heathen of Sweden or of Saxony, or as through the eyes of St. Francis Xavier we view the natives of Goa and Travancore, of the Moluccas and Japan, so by means of the American missionaries we see the Indians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is extraordinary, how large a part of our knowledge of their characters and their sociology is derived from the lives or narratives of such men—of Eliot and Brainerd, of the Jesuits of the north and the Franciscans of the southwest. The same is true of the life of the frontier. Few travellers show us so much of the actual conditions of backwoods existence as the itinerant missionaries—of the clearings and the log-cabins, the rude agriculture and the perpetual fevers, the camp-meetings and the Indian depredations, the fraternal kindness and the limitless hospitality. Best of all for our purposes are the Methodist circuit-riders, keen, hearty men, whose outdoor life kept them healthy in mind and body, and whose grasp on

the real world had never been relaxed by education. As one of them says, who at the risk of his life had ridden the Clarksburg circuit during the Indian wars preceding Wayne's treaty, "To speak in backwoods style, they appeared to be surrounded by a kind of holy 'knock-'em-down' power, that was often irresistible". They were not forever feeling their spiritual pulses and doubting of their own salvation, like some anaemic graduates of theological seminaries whose biographers have deemed them very precious vessels because of the very traits that made them useless; nor were they forever walking in visions, like so many of the Quaker itinerants, whose books are often so beautiful and to the historical inquirer so disappointing. Stout-hearted, downright, muscular, practical, the circuit-rider faced the actual world of the frontier, and saw it clearly. If like Peter Cartwright or Henry Smith he leaves behind him a description of what he saw, we are much the gainers.

But even in the older parts of the country, there have been regions or classes of which we know little unless by chance we find some faint record in the early life of one who rose out of them to saintship. We know well the leaders of Virginia politics and society at the time of the Revolution—every important thought and sentiment of Washington and Jefferson, Madison and Henry. But were it not for what little we can glean from the lives of Rev. Devereux Jarratt and Elder Barton W. Stone, should we know one fact, aside from genealogy and county records, about the poor people of Bath Parish and Pittsylvania County, their sentiments and their opinions? If it were a question of Boeotia or of early Wessex, we should treasure every such fact with minute care. Why should we not treasure with equal zeal the little glimpses into life on West River which are afforded us by the memoirs of Thomas Story, or the quaint pictures which his fellow-Quaker John Richardson gives us of Bermuda and its governor, of Nantucket society at the beginning of the eighteenth century and of its Deborah, Mary Starbuck?

Not less interesting than the occasional glimpses which we obtain into the lives of out-of-the-way communities, or of inarticulate classes not represented in literature, are many passages in the lives of Catholic or Protestant worthies who were not of English descent. They paint for us the obscure processes of Americanization. Quaintly expressed, but typical of American conditions, is the religious experience of Brother Crum, a German Methodist in Maryland. He said, "I prayed in Dutch; I am Dutch; and must get converted in Dutch. These are all English people, and they got

converted in English. I prayed and prayed in Dutch, but could not get the blessing. As last I felt willing to get converted in English or Dutch, as the Lord pleased. Then the blessing came, and I got converted in English."

It would not be easy to enumerate all the little ways in which the lives of the American saints may enlarge our knowledge of the social background, the substantial warp of our American fabric. Many saints studied at the small colleges of our early days, many taught in country schools or academies; we can learn something from them, incidentally, of the progress of education. They show us something of slavery. Anthony Jefferson Pearson is warned by his father and, his biographer thinks, might well have been anxious in his own mind, lest his connection with the African Sabbath School in the little town in Tennessee where he is attending college might injure him in the estimation of others. He prayerfully tosses up a coin—it is the year 1831, when extreme reformers had their fullest swing—to determine whether his course through this vale of tears, this solemn period of probation, shall be marked by the moderate use of tea and coffee, or whether he shall confine himself strictly to water. It is not without interest to learn that even in 1817, at Augusta, Georgia, it was already customary for the piano to be drowned by conversation at all tea-parties; and the street cries of early Boston are illustrated by the imitations of them with which a youthful saint awakes from sleep and shows to the ear of her anxious parent and biographer that she has passed the crisis of a dangerous illness. We know what our sensations are on seeing a peach-orchard. What were those of Elder Abner W. Clopton in 1828? "Seeing a flourishing peach-orchard by the road, he felt so sensibly on the consequences which it would produce, that he entered the house of the owner, and warned him, or rather his lady, of the danger of the temptation—expressing his fears that the fruit of that orchard would bring her to widowhood, and her babes to orphanage. In two years his fears were realized". To the elder's mind, a peach-orchard had but one meaning; in that meaning lies the explanation of the western insurrection of 1794.

More broadly speaking, the distilled essence of a multitude of these saintly biographies is able, as in the case of the European nations, to show us something of national character. Certain traits which are characteristic or frequent in the lives of medieval saints are absent or curiously infrequent in those of America. They are not records of austerities and macerations. The Methodist circuit-rider came eating and drinking. The chickens fled at his approach.

The American saint has lived his life in the world, not in a monastery. His piety has been a Protestant piety, looking toward edification and sanctification of the human being much more than toward the ceaseless adoration of God, contemplative resignation to his will, mystical absorption in his essence. We find few ecstasies like those of St. Teresa. There is a striking want of poetic or imaginative touches. The American saint may be capable of exalted self-sacrifice, but he does not ceremoniously take Lady Poverty to be his bride. He shows us no parallel to St. Francis preaching to the birds, or singing the praises of the Lord responsively with the nightingales of Assisi. He lives in the dry air of this western world, and shares its active, practical, work-a-day life. He has little depth of thought, little subtlety of theology. The triumphant debates with opponents, which his biographer so often records with admiration, are triumphs of Philistine smartness rather than of candor or elevation or spiritual discernment. But, like his nation, he makes up for lack of depth by dexterity, versatility and practical efficiency. He knows what to do in an emergency, and carries into the life of the circuit-rider, the missionary or the reformer that quickness of invention bred in generations of Americans by the life of the forest or the isolated farmstead. Nowhere in literature will you find a completer manifestation of the universal Yankee, inventive, resourceful, brimming over with energy and enterprise, than in the life of the Rev. Cyrus Hamlin, missionary in Constantinople. Not for him the mere preaching of sermons. He must be up and doing. To give work to his Armenian converts in the time of the Crimean war, he organizes great bakeries which supply the allied armies. He enters into the laundry business, and, when his protégées are halted a moment by the indescribable condition of the soldiers' clothing, he devises machinery to enable them to perform their task. He invents the best cholera mixture ever known in Turkey. He establishes factories wherein some of his people can support themselves by making stove-pipes, instructs others in the manufacture of rat-traps, invents a new kind of coffee-mill, and meantime maintains a theological seminary and founds a college.

The American saints have also imbibed from their native atmosphere a cheerful and hopeful spirit, which not even the extreme rigors of ultra-Calvinism can wholly destroy. They know themselves to be members of a rising empire, in which the common man shall have opportunities he has nowhere enjoyed before. They feel themselves to be in the full stream of progress, and with lusty cour-

age and enthusiasm lay their lands upon the oar. They are like Andrew Marvell's exiles in the "remote Bermudas":

Thus sung they in the English boat  
A holy and a cheerful note,  
And all the while, to guide their chime,  
With falling oars they kept the time.

Not less characteristic is it that the sense of progress is so often, at any rate among the saints of the nineteenth century, expressed numerically. The dry American mind loves figures. Chiefly occupied with measurable material tasks—the subduing of the wilderness, the bridging of rivers, the laying of railroads, the growing of crops—the American has acquired an inveterate interest in statistic, in the making of a "record", and carries it with him into other than practical concerns. He thinks arithmetically concerning his church, his paintings and his sports. Those who compare American athletics to those of Greece forget that the Greek had no stop-watch, no accurate means of measuring time. Does the American actually love out-of-door sports, the pleasure of the pathless woods, the "breezy call of incense-breathing morn", or does he love numerical records of out-of-door sports? Certainly the crowd in front of the newspaper's tabular bulletin-board seems not less intent than the crowd on the "grand-stand". Certainly there is a deep and widespread interest in the framing of "all-America" nines and elevens, one of the most disinterestedly ideal of all mathematical employments. In a similar spirit, Rev. Peter Cartwright and his fellows do not often fail to let us know the number of those converted at each camp-meeting.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the interest of these little lives of long-forgotten worthies, or the amount which they can yield to the student of American social history or of national psychology. In most of them there are long arid stretches. Most of them are written in the "*patois* of Canaan", in the set phrases of obsolete theologies, making difficult or tedious reading for the modern inquirer. If one ventures to insist a little upon their utility to the younger investigator, it is from a sense of a real danger which besets the latter's pathway, the danger of confining himself to the constitutional and political history of America, now so easy to study, and from a consequent desire to urge upon him the claims which American religious history may make upon one who wishes a full understanding of the American character and spirit. One would not wish to trench upon the field so excellently covered by last

year's presidential address before this association; and indeed it is obvious that the study of the social history and national psychology of the United States may and must be approached by many pathways. Yet there is something to be said for the contention that, of all means of estimating American character from American history, the pursuit of religious history is the most complete. If we approach the problem through the history of American literature we are in constant danger of forgetting how small the literary class is and always has been. Even if we include the readers as well as the producers, we cannot assume that the traits which are revealed by our literary writings are necessarily those of the nation at large, the obscure, unreading, unprinting majority. The cleverest of books upon our literary history seems often to make defective estimates of our national character for want of access to the minds of these inarticulate ones. What is true of literature, is even more true of philosophy. If we turn to the history of the plastic arts in America, how brief, how limited has been their course. Not through them, surely, can the American spirit be made to yield up its total secret, be appreciated in its general extent. The history of American music is an equally slender stream. Little of American life beyond that of recent years and large cities can be said to be reflected in it. How slight a part music played in the first one hundred and fifty years of our colonial existence, even in the most intelligent of our towns, may be seen by a delicious passage in one of our saintly biographies, Turell's life of Dr. Benjamin Colman. The worthy doctor makes a series of proposals to his Boston congregation and others, advocating that the old psalm-book should be enriched by more modern additions. Among these proposals we find the following, which paints to the life the musical abilities of a Boston congregation, thirty years before the Revolution;

8. That with respect unto such Psalms as Dr. Watts has adapted only to a Tune which our Congregation cannot sing, either we resolve upon learning and bringing into Use among us said Tune, or that a new Metre of such Psalms, or part of them, be attempted as near as we can turn them to his Stile and Manner.

He who would understand the American of past and present times, and to that end would provide himself with data representing all classes, all periods, and all regions, may find in the history of American religion the closest approach to the **continuous record** he desires. Not that all or even most Americans have been religious, but there have been religious men and women in every class, every period, every subdivision of America, and multitudes

of them have left individual or collective records of their thoughts and ways and feelings. Millions have felt an interest in religion where thousands have felt an interest in literature or philosophy, in music or art. Millions have known little of any book save one, and that one the most interesting of religious books, the most influential, the most powerful to mould and transform. Doubtless they were occupied mainly with the tasks of daily life; their achievements in these, and the conflicts of economic interest which accompanied them, may be reduced to solid and instructive statistics, without which social history may become unsubstantial and vague. But no view is truthful that leaves out of account the ideals which animated these toiling millions, the thoughts concerning the universe and man which informed their minds. The Spanish trooper held himself to be ever in the hand of the God of Israel, who guided his chosen people by pillars of fire and of cloud. The Puritan farmer sighted his promised land from the top of Pisgah, and thought of no similitude for his Indian warfare but the smiting of the Hittites and the Jebusites. The imagination of the pioneer mother, making with her baby the weary journey through the western wilderness, had no parallel to dwell on but that of the Flight into Egypt.

Moreover, the history of religion in America holds a peculiarly close relation to the general history of the American spirit from the fact that here, more than elsewhere, the concerns of churches have been managed by the laity or in accordance with their will. If ever anywhere ecclesiastical history can be rightly treated as consisting solely of the history of ecclesiastics, certainly it has not been so in the United States. It has reflected the thoughts and sentiments, not of a priestly caste, but of the mass of laymen. An acute English observer, Bishop Coke, speaking of the able debates he heard at the conference of the Methodist preachers of America in 1792, says, "Throughout the debates they conducted themselves as the servants of the people, and therefore never lost sight of them on any question."

Let us take a few examples. In the psychic life of Europe we recognize the middle portion of the eighteenth century as a time of heightened emotionality. We see this in the *Sturm und Drang* literature of Germany, in Rousseau and the Methodists, in the wave of national feeling that swept William Pitt to supreme power. In treating the European history of that period, we should never think of ignoring phenomena so significant. Ought we then, when we are dealing with the same age in the history of a country which was practically without literature, art or nationality, to ignore the Great

Awakening, or to treat it otherwise than as the most important and significant event of its time?

Fifty years later we hear in the spiritual life of Europe another modulation of key, the Romantic Movement. The richer culture of the Old World enables us to trace it in many manifestations, in the shifting of ground from rationalism to mysticism, in the rapid heightening of national feeling, in the abrupt transition from *The Botanic Garden* of Dr. Erasmus Darwin to *Childe Harold* and *The Battle of the Baltic*. Such a wave of feeling, we may be sure, could not fail to transmit itself across the Atlantic, and to be manifested in some form in the America of 1800, still colonially dependent upon the European mind. We do indeed trace a slight romantic movement in American literature, a faint heightening of American patriotism, slowly mustering courage for the War of 1812. But if we would seek the most powerful and pervasive manifestation of the movement, the best analogy which the poverty of American culture permitted, we can find it nowhere else than in the wonderful religious revivals which in those years swept through America, and especially through the forest camp-meetings of the non-literary West. It is a narrow-minded student who pursues with eager interest every tortuous move of Jeffersonian diplomacy but disdains to read of these vital movements, or who fails to perceive how closely and with what equal steps the really great political advances of the Jeffersonian era are accompanied by parallel movements in theology and religion, the growth of the Methodists, Unitarians and Disciples, with their heightened sense of the dignity of human nature and of the importance of fraternal union. Equally limited is the mind which can not find in the early story of Mormonism a prime source of illumination upon the actual mentality of the obscure villagers of 1830.

With a little hesitation, one may take a pregnant example from the history of the latest period. The most interesting American historical biography published in recent years, and one deserving an important place in our "Acta Sanctorum", is the life of Mrs. Mary Eddy. A plea for the study of American religious history by others than young theologues may well take account of the movement which she represents. We have here no concern with the validity or invalidity of its theological or philosophical basis. We are only to consider it, with all proper respect, as a phenomenon in the American history of the last twenty-five years. Great pains have been expended in the effort to separate fact from baseless tradition in the early years of Mohammedanism. We welcome with



enthusiasm those wonderful discoveries of early Manichæan manuscripts through which the Prussian Academy's recent explorations in Turkestan have laid before us the development of another great modification of Christianity. But here we have growing up among us, in the full light of day, a new religion with a million adherents, threatening in the early years of the twentieth century as grave an invasion of the domain of traditional Christianity as Joachim of Flora and the Eternal Gospel threatened in the early years of the thirteenth; and how many young doctors of philosophy, concerned with recent history, have made a thorough study of the movement? Yet he who cannot explain it to himself must not pretend that he understands the American society of the last quarter-century—or at any rate the bourgeois society of our long-settled communities; since it is from the bourgeois portions of settled society that new religions are apt to spring.

We are accustomed to adjourn such explanations by saying that it is too soon to make them; and no doubt this is true. Yet certain lines of remark seem already open. We can measure the distance we have come. It is a long remove from the tribal god of the early Puritans, the vertebrate Jehovah, the self-conscious martinet of a troubled universe, to the vague and circumambient deity of Mrs. Eddy, the fluid source of therapeutic beneficence. But it marks a long transition in our social life. The early colonist, his life environed with dangers and studded with marked events, must have on high a conscious and watchful sovereign, ever ready to protect the body and to chasten the soul by drastic interpositions. At the other extreme,

We sit here in the Promised Land

That flows with Freedom's honey and milk.

Few of us are ever in personal danger. We have had years of extraordinary prosperity. The comfortable middle-class society of our settled communities has had little occasion to feel the heart-gripping stresses of danger and calamity and remorse. In such a soft society, illness and physical pain easily come to seem the chief evils of life. Consciousness of nerves and consciousness of the processes of digestion come to take nearly the place which consciousness of sin held in the mind of the seventeenth-century American. Such a society, the product of peace and industrial prosperity, is sure to be seized with great power by a religion which cheerfully ignores evil and which, whatever its claims upon superior intellects, presents itself to the mass of bourgeois minds as primarily a religion of healing.

Why do not Americans study more intently the age of the Antonines? There they will find a state of society singularly resembling our own—a world grown prosperous and soft and humane with long-continued peace and abounding industrial development, a population formed by the mixture of all races, in which the ancient stock still struggles to rule and to assimilate, but is powerless to preserve unimpaired its traditions, a mushroom growth of cities, a universal passion for organization into industrial unions and fraternal orders, a system in which woman has exceptionally full equality with man, a society in which the newly rich occupy the centre of the stage, offending the eye with the vulgar display of brute wealth yet pacifying the mind and heart with the record of numberless and kindly benefactions. In this soft and genial society, the benign product of world-wide peace and growing wealth, we may find analogies for almost every phenomenon of present-day American religion, from the sumptuous ritual of historic churches to the crude deceptions of vagrant astrologers, from the “timbrelled an-thems” of the Salvation Army to the viscous rhetoric of Christian Science. Isis and Mithra and the pagan origins of Gnosticism can help us to understand the swarming religions of Chicago and New York, and through them the society to which they belong.

To the young teacher or investigator, to whom such discourses as this are principally or most hopefully addressed, such illustrations may seem far-fetched and inconclusive. Possibly they are so. But it may be hoped that at least the main theses of this address may nevertheless receive on the part of such hearers a careful consideration. In every other period of recorded time, we know that the study of religion casts valuable light on many other aspects of history. Why should it be otherwise with the religious history of America? Unless we are content to confine ourselves to the well-worn grooves of constitutional and political history, and to resign to sciences less cautious than history the broad story of American culture, why should we not seek light from every quarter? Most of all let us seek it from the history of American religion, in the sum total an ample record, even though in parts we have to compose it like a mosaic from fragments of unpromising material.

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